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ABSTRACT

The debate continues as to whether the principal should be more closely allied with management or with teachers in the negotiations arena. Ultimately, however, most principals will gravitate toward the management corner; principals of large school districts will form independent bargaining units; principals in smaller districts will be more inclined to join with the superintendent on a management team; and department heads and supervisors of special areas will become more middle-management oriented, joining with principals in the local bargaining unit. (Author/WM)

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NEGOTIATIONS: THE ROAD AHEAD

by Richard A. Dempsey

If one were to look back through the past programs of annual meetings of the NASSP, he would not have to go far to find the first time that professional negotiations was thought to be a timely topic for discussion. The term, the process, and the concerns that surround negotiations have moved upon all of us in an exceedingly brief span of time. And every educator at this conference today and every astute observer of the contemporary educational scene knows full well that collective bargaining has become in just a few short years the overriding challenge to our profession.

So much has been said about professional negotiations that one is at a loss to find anything new and positive that might resolve the controversy. But lest we handicap ourselves with our lamentations, I propose that we address our endeavors to negotiations, the road ahead. First, however, let us take a brief look at how we got where we are today.

It is my observation that many (if not most) administrators are still bewildered by the swiftness that the negotiations blitzkrieg descended upon us. And we are all still just a little stunned and trying to regroup and to reunify our forces. I am reminded of the distressing and sarcastic opening line from Robinson Jeffers poem "Black Out", written shortly after Pearl Harbor: "The war that we have carefully for years provoked comes on us unprepared, amazed and indignant."

This is so much like our present situation in collective negotiations. Unprepared? Yes. Amazed? Yes. Indignant? Most of us still are. And the question often heard among principals, "Why did they do this to us?" should really be "Why didn't they do this to us sooner?"

For a seemingly endless time we, as educational administrators, have been unaware of the existence of teachers. To us (to parody Gertrude Stein) A Teacher is a Teacher is a Teacher. Too many of us have given lip service to the idea that teachers needed to be involved in the decision making process. We then structured the agendas so that the decisions in which their involvement was needed were relegated to the level of choosing chalk colors or whether or not there would be the annual Christmas party. We have been most distressed that teachers, of all people, should want a "say" in the real decisions about running the school. We have been dismayed by the notion that teachers have begun to feel a new awareness about themselves and about their profession.

And how are teachers responding to the awareness that they are important? Those who are not leaving are actively involved in claiming their importance and in challenging all aspects of the system that deny or withhold it. The stereotype of the marginally intelligent, marginally successful male, and the stern, sexless spinster teacher are becoming obsolete. Awareness of their importance and potential power has led teachers to transform docile unions and associations into active agents for change. Strikes, grievances, mediation, and arbitration have become common rather than rare practices. Teachers and teachers organizations are now demanding the right to be involved in the real decisions that affect them. This involvement is being written into contracts.

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And not only are new guidelines being established in contractual form, but administrative prerogatives — once assumed to be sacred, are also being negotiated into contracts. And as we wring our hands in disbelief and despair, we must admit that we are the ones who created our Pearl Harbor.

Yes, there has been a slippage in our ranks, but rather than continue to be "unprepared, amazed and indignant," let us turn our attention to the road ahead.

SOME PREDICTIONS

I would like to make some predictions. Some may not be pleasant to hear. Some of these predictions will occur almost certainly, while others will occur only if the profession seeks actively to bring them about.

1. I predict that the debate as to whether the principal is more closely allied with management or with teachers will not cease in the foreseeable future. I say this because this is a gutty issue and one that will have to be fought out in each local arena in the land. It will have to be determined in the light of the local history surrounding school board/school administrator relationships. It will have to be determined on the basis of the local personalities of those involved.

2. I predict that, ultimately principals will gravitate toward a position that will be more akin to that of superintendents and boards of education. We can already see evidence of the concerns of superintendents' groups about where principals will stand. And there is much evidence, too, that boards of education want the principals on their side — the management side. By contrast, we can see an attitude of many teachers association leaders that ranges from ambivalence to hostility about the principal's membership in state and national teachers organizations. These two pressures, I believe, will cause principals to become more aligned with management.

3. I predict that in large school districts there will be a concerted effort by principals to form independent bargaining units. We can already see some movement in this direction. These bargaining units will act independently of the teachers organization, but in some ways they may support each other. I can see a strike by principals in which the teachers will refuse to cross a one-man picket line. Needless to say local boards of education will actively work to thwart this movement.

4. I predict that in smaller school districts, where there are smaller numbers of principals, principals will be more inclined to become part of a management team with the superintendent. In so doing the principals will insist on well thought out procedures for conferring with boards of education as a means for gaining their professional and welfare goals. But unless boards of education become more responsive to the problems and needs of principals than they have been, I believe that the management team concept will disintegrate. What will probably follow is that principals in the smaller school districts will then begin to form bargaining organizations that transcend school district lines. These groups may be organized on a county wide/or area basis, and their purpose will be to look after the rights and welfare of the members.

5. I predict that department heads and supervisors of special areas will become more middle management oriented and join with principals in their local bargaining unit. We are just beginning to redefine the role and function of the secondary school department head. For years merely the departmental inventory taker, the department head is rapidly emerging as an important figure on the secondary school scene. As principals daily become more inundated with non-educational problems, they are turning more and more to department chairmen to provide leadership. Department heads are becoming more actively involved in developing departmental budgets, writing objectives, providing in-service educational programs, recruiting and orienting new staff members, and supervising and evaluating teachers. This last function, that of the supervision and evaluation of teachers, is one that is causing the greatest concern to some leaders in the teachers organizations. And it may be that this will emerge as the reason why department chairmen become persona non grata in the teachers organizations.

6. I predict that state and national associations will begin to give principals stronger support and provide greater resources with regards to collective negotiations. I believe that it is imperative that all state and national professional administrative organizations recognize the major role they must play in providing information and services to those on the firing line.

7. I predict that as a result of negotiations everyone involved in school management will ultimately join together at the state and national levels in the formation of one large "umbrella" organization. This is not to say that I predict the end of such organizations as NASSP, AASA, NAESP, or ASCD or that they will merge — definitely not! These organizations have done an exceptionally fine job for their membership over the years and they should retain their identities. But I do see the need for one group, whose membership is derived from all of the professional administrative organizations and whose primary concern is with a unified thrust on matters of legislation, welfare, and the dissemination of information. Now some might feel that this might widen the gulf between teachers and administrators -- I don't. The gulf has never been wider than it is today. An umbrella organization similar to the one I envision, with the strength of the membership of all of the administrative organizations providing the power base, will be in a much more viable position to enter into realistic dialogue with the teacher groups about matters that affect the entire profession.

CONCLUSION

The role of school principals today is not only being tested but it is actually being threatened. It is being threatened because there are obvious gaps between the role the principal actually plays and the role that he should play. It is being threatened by those who say that the principal is no longer the educational leader of the school and that he can be replaced by a business manager. It is being threatened because, for the most part, the principal has been left out of the negotiations process. And it is being threatened because

principals themselves have had to be more concerned about budgets, grievances, and due process than they have in defining the role and responsibility of the principal in the light of collective bargaining legislation. What then should be done? I would like to propose several steps that need to be taken immediately.

1. We are going to have to take a good hard look inward. Collective bargaining has created a great deal of confusion about the role of the secondary school principal. Traditionally, the principal has been the chief spokesman for the needs of teachers. But with legislation that permitted teachers to form bargaining units for the purpose of direct negotiations with the board of education, the principal has been bypassed and his new role remains unclear.

2. We must stop being bystanders to the negotiations process. Both law and custom give teachers the right to participate in collective bargaining. But law and custom have overlooked the principal's role in the negotiation process. The trend in many parts of the nation will, if continued, relegate the principal to ordering supplies and supervising non-certified personnel.

3. The NASSP must begin to organize a task force of practicing administrators that will look at the role and responsibilities of the principal with particular regard for the impact that collective negotiations have had on the erosion of the principal's role.

4. That based on this statement of roles and responsibility a position must be taken by the NASSP — hopefully with the endorsement of the other professional administrative organizations — that will reestablish the principal's position.

5. That we organize within NASSP (as well as with each state affiliate) a group whose fundamental concern is that of monitoring the critical happenings related to professional negotiations and disseminating this information to the membership.

6. That we develop with other administrative organizations a professional model of our own design for negotiating with boards of education, a model that is different from the labor model with its severe restrictions on a profession such as ours.

7. That the NASSP (and its state affiliates) apply appropriate pressure on college and university professors to refrain from adding to the existing cleavage between teachers and administrators by planting their anti-administration prejudices in both undergraduate and graduate students through derogatory and unethical comments about secondary school administrators.

8. That NASSP (and its state affiliates) apply appropriate pressure to these same colleges and universities to establish both pre-service and in-service programs for principals that will allow the neophyte as well as the veteran to understand the negotiations problems in the most positive manner possible.

9. That as an organization we look at the road ahead and regroup, put order in our ranks, and begin moving from our present defensive position.

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